DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 280 000 CS 008 702

AUTHOR Tutolo, Daniel
TITLE The Changing Role of the Reading Specialist.
PUB DATE Feb 87
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators (Houston, TX, February 15-18, 1987).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Educational Change; Educational Practices; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Leadership Responsibility; *Reading Consultants; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Teachers; Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Reading; *Resource Staff; Teaching Methods; Theory Practice Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Leadership

ABSTRACT

The role of special reading teachers is currently in flux, as local education agencies expect them to work increasingly with other teachers and parents and consequently provide less direct instruction for students. Historically, reading specialists taught disabled readers since it was hypothesized that their special training in reading diagnosis would lead to more successful instruction than was available in the regular classroom. But empirical studies questioned this advantage, and researchers discovered that most children in special reading programs were not disabled readers but slow learners. Now, specialists instruct fewer children directly, and instead coordinate formal diagnosis for the entire staff, as well as conducting inservice sessions to release teacher potential. Some of the following functions will emerge as responsibilities: (1) coordinating materials selection committees; (2) assisting in setting, modifying and evaluating program goals; (3) coordinating instruction for students with varied linguistic backgrounds; and (4) working directly with classroom teachers to introduce new methodologies--the most crucial function. Reading specialists should now be identified as reading resource teachers because their primary role has shifted from teaching students to aiding teachers. Such a resource person must stop thinking exclusively as a classroom teacher, develop leadership competence, balance theory and practice, as well as plan for overall schoolwide change in reading procedure. (NKA)

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ED280000

A Paper Presented
to the
National Meeting of the
Association of Teacher Educators

The Changing Role of the Reading Specialist

Adam's Mark Hotel
Houston, Texas

February 12-19, 1987

Daniel Tutolo, Ph.D.
Professor of Education
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio U.S.A.
43403

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The Changing Role of the Reading Specialist

Reading personnel can be considered in two categories those who work directly with children and those who work directly with teachers. The position of those who work directly with students is presently going through metamorphosis. The reading specialist is in the process of becoming a reading resource person who devotes most of the working day to helping classroom teachers. This paper will document the prevailing trends in this change.

Traditionally, reading specialists were prepared to diagnose and prescribe reading instruction for individual or small groups of students. Diagnosis involved the administration of a series of standardized tests and the writing of a case study. With the prescription as a reference point the teacher carried out instruction continuously revising the prescription based on new diagnostic information. This approach was appropriately called the diagnostic prescriptive approach and was pervasive throughout the 1970's.

Presently, the role of the special reading teacher is in flux as local education agencies are expecting the reading specialist to work more and more with other teachers and parents and consequently provide less direct instruction for students. This change as it becomes more clearly understood by state education agencies, teacher preparation institutions, administrators and reading specialists will necessitate a modification of preparation and certification requirements. Not only will the reading specialist be expected to thoroughly understand the reading process and methodologies for teaching reading but the specialist will need to develop new communication skills in order to work more closely with staff. In

addition, leadership skills will be needed to advise and counsel all staff members directly and indirectly involved with the teaching of reading.

Historically, the reading specialist taught the disabled reader identified by the use of a combination of informal and formal testing procedures. When a considerable negative difference was found between reading achievement and reading potential, disability was alleged. A schedule of instruction was planned and the reading specialist worked to remediate the problems of the disabled reader. The Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association identified the responsibilities of the reading specialist with major responsibility for working directly with children in this way.

> Identify students needing diagnosis and/or remediation
>
> Plan a program of remediation from data gathered through diagnosis
>
> Implement such a program of remediation
>
> Evaluate student progress in remediation
>
> Interpret student needs and progress in remediation to the classroom teacher and parents
>
> Plan and implement a developmental or advanced program as necessary
>
> Diagnose and treat more complex and severe reading disability cases
>
> Provide internship training for prospective reading specialists
>
> (Roles, Responsibilities, and Qualifications of Reading Specialists, p. 1)

It was hypothesized the reading specialist would have more success with disabled readers than the regular classroom teacher because of the special training and skill in diagnosis which would lead to pin point remediation. Empirical studies, however, question this advantage. An

examination of the diagnosis of practicing reading specialists revealed a large number of one-time-only statements having questionable relevance to remediation, reading diagnoses which systematically failed to mention the reading skills of greatest importance to remediation and when important skills were mentioned in the diagnosis statements were not reliably linked with treatment. (Vinsonhaler, Weinshank, Wagner, and Polin, p. 160)

Another claim for superior results was the wide range of instructional procedures and materials that could be employed in an individual or small group teaching situation. For example, the reading specialist could use a programmed approach, the language experience approach, a multimedia approach, or an adapted basal approach, utilizing supplemental phonics materials selected from the wide array of commercial materials available. In practice, however, it was found that classroom teachers were using the same approaches and had access to similar materials, thus little difference was found in application.

As an outgrowth of the study of instructional approaches researchers discovered that most children in special reading programs were not disabled readers but rather slow learners. These children experience at least moderate success in learning to read in the regular classroom using traditional approaches. (Rupley and Blair, p. 390) The reading specialist could and often did enhance achievement scores in a more favorable environment yet those gains in achievement often disappeared when the pupil was no longer provided remedial instruction. After an extensive analysis of the compensatory education literature of Title I programs (now Chapter 1) researchers concluded "... participants have some slight edge over non-participants" and "... the effects are probably not sustained." (Mullin and Summers, p. 342)

Another case of short lived success had to do with affective concerns, particularly the development of self-image of the disabled reader. With individualized and small group instruction including immediate feedback the reading specialist focused on ways to improve self concept which included accepting the student as a valued person, reducing negative comments, making student success known to others and placing failure in a given area in proper perspective with successes in other areas. (Quandt, p. 28) The reading specialist could and did improve learner self-perception. However, personal reports made to this author by reading specialists in Ohio schools indicate, too often, when the pupil returned to the regular classroom where comparison of reading ability between enriched, average and disabled readers could not be avoided, self-image suffered. One third grade pupil summarized this problem in this scenario. "I go to reading class where the teacher says I'm doing great. I always get stars on my papers and feel pretty good. I go back to my classroom and my teacher says I have to work harder to finish my work. When I finish it's never good enough. I can't read the books and I know it. Guess I'm just a dummy."

Clearly problems occurred with what has been called the "pullout" model of remedial instruction where disabled readers were identified, taken from the regular classroom at selected times and provided instruction by a reading specialist. Pullout may be the most frequently criticized aspect of compensatory programs for separation from the normal classroom can lead to fragmentation of the school experience (Allington, p. 263).

In summary more success through the efforts of reading specialists could not be demonstrated for pin point evaluation did not take place, achievement gains were not lasting and self-image of remedial students often suffered. In addition, a fourth factor effected the teaching-learning environment after compensatory programs were instituted.

Namely, classroom teachers were expanding skills for teaching reading through extensive inservice. The more they learned, the more they wanted to learn. The reading specialist was a readily available source of information and teachers turned to this source regularly. The role of the reading specialist was evolving.

The Right to Read Newsletter reported as follows: "If the evidence presented on the questionnaires returned to this publication are indicative of a nation-wide trend, then the time has arrived when reading specialists are coming out of the closets. Although our survey does not constitute hard data to support the supposition the majority of reading specialists are functioning as resource people for teachers rather than working directly with small classes of remedial readers, changes are occurring and the trend is in that direction". (Right to Read, no page)

This trend appears to be continuing for in 1982 the I.R.A. published Effecting Change in School Reading Programs: The Resource Role, a monograph reporting changes taking place in the special reading teacher's role. "There does appear to be overwhelming evidence that the role of the reading specialist has changed... The need for specialists serving as resource persons appears to be growing". (Bean and Wilson, p. 4)

What role is emerging for the reading resource teacher? What special skills will the reading specialist need in the future? How will Colleges of Education adapt to meet these needs? After reviewing the literature and consulting with opinion leaders in the reading field, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Emphasis will change in diagnosis from one of assessing students to one of helping classroom teachers to assess students. In addition, the reading teacher will facilitate staff development, coordinate communication

between teachers of reading and provide instructional leadership. Details on the four categories of change follow.

Diagnosis

The area in which teachers and principals have depended most heavily upon reading specialists for expertise has been that of diagnosis. Traditionally the specialist diagnosed and prescribed for small groups of children. Now, the specialist will directly instruct fewer children and coordinate formal diagnosis for the entire staff of one building utilizing standardized achievement tests in reading for comparative data. In addition, the reading specialist will assist teachers to use informal means of diagnosis. More and more emphasis will be placed on informal assessment utilizing informal reading inventories, interest inventories, and attitude scales. The more knowledgeable teacher of tomorrow will be expected to efficiently use observational techniques to determine reading progress.

Staff Development

The fundamental purpose of staff development is the improvement of educational programs for students. Emphasis for staff development was often on classroom teachers and improvement of teaching methodology. Traditionally this emphasis took the form of activities planned to "shape things up," that is, activities designed to renew and update teacher's knowledge of teaching. Today a new perception of staff development is emerging. We make the assumption teachers are knowledgeable professional people who understand the teaching-learning function. Reading specialists as they conduct inservice sessions consider the primary goal to "free people up", that is, to release teacher potential. (Beegle and Edelfelt, p. 12) This dramatic change in thinking holds the promise of liberating teachers and improving teaching and learning in ways we could not imagine just a decade ago. If diagnosis was the most important function of the

reading specialist, staff development will become the most important function in the future.

As special teachers of reading move away from direct teaching, the following functions will emerge as responsibilities.

1. Plan inservice programs to accommodate identified staff needs.
2. Coordinate materials selection committees.
3. Encourage the school board to make professional and fiscal commitments to improvement of program.
4. Aid in modifying curriculum school-wide.
5. Assist in setting, modifying and evaluating program goals.
6. Aid teachers in finding supplementary instructional materials.
7. Encourage development of library resources.
8. Coordinate instruction for students with varied linguistic backgrounds.
9. Train volunteers.
10. Keep the school staff informed about changes in the field of reading.
11. Work with classroom teachers on action research.
12. Work directly with classroom teachers introducing new methodologies.

While all of these functions are important, none is nearly so important as the last one, that of working directly with teachers providing innovative methodology. Studies have indicated the crucial nature of this function. There seems to be strong support across investigations of exemplary reading programs for teacher liberation, which involves, freeing teachers to become whatever they are capable of becoming. Educators and government officials have been too optimistic about how much time and effort is needed to produce change in an educational setting. (Samuels, p. 267) We must view with skepticism the traditional approach of hiring an inservice consultant to come in for one day to present ideas to a district

wide staff. This shot-gun approach has been widely criticized by many involved in inservice education. A formal presentation to a large group too often fails to meet immediate needs of participants. Instead, we must utilize our reading specialist on a school-wide basis to work directly with colleagues to implement change. The reading specialist knows the staff and can establish personal ties with each and every teacher. Time and patience are needed to bring about instructional change. This change is best facilitated by one-to-one interaction between the reading specialist and teacher.

"Investigations indicate a combination of the following activities can be helpful whether they are directed toward the fine tuning of styles or the mastery of new approaches." (Joyce, Hersh, McKibben, p. 39) Let us remember teachers' concerns move through developmental stages: awareness of a need to change, understanding of how to change and resolution or mastery of an alternative.

1. Presentation of theory - studying theory can provide the rationale, conceptual base, and verbal description of an approach to teaching or instructional technique. Lectures often supported by films and discussions are among the most common forms of presentation. Too often the presentation of theory has been the sole component of inservice, yet others are equally important.

2. Modeling or demonstration - modeling involves enactment of a teaching skill or strategy either through a live demonstration with pupils or through media. In a training activity, a strategy or skill can be modeled any number of times, and this repetition seems to be crucial to effectiveness. Each demonstration adds a new dimension for the participant(s).

3. Practice under simulated conditions - practice involves trying out a new skill or strategy. Simulated conditions are usually achieved by practicing with small groups of children under circumstances which do not require management of the entire class.

4. Structured feedback - structured feedback involves learning a system for observing teaching behavior and providing an opportunity to reflect on those observations. Feedback can be self administered (when video taping is used), provided by observers, or given by peers and the reading specialist. It can be regular

or occasional. It can be combined with other components which are organized toward the acquisition of new skills. These training components are not linear and sequential rather they can be administered flexibly as needed.

5. Coaching for application - when the four training components listed above are used the level of impact is considerable, whether the object is the tuning of style or mastery of a new method for teaching reading. Presentation of theory, modeling, practice and structured demonstration of unfamiliar models reach the skill acquisition level of impact with probably nine out of ten teachers. If consistent feedback is provided with classroom practice, a good many, but not all, will transfer their skills into the teaching situation. For others, however, direct coaching on how to apply the new skills appears to be necessary. This coaching is provided by the reading specialist one who more thoroughly understands the teaching of reading and has developed a good working relationship with the staff.

Whether one adopts all five components or selects from these components can be a decision shared by the reading specialist and the teacher. The overriding value of this new approach to staff development is that one shot information is not enough. Demonstration, followed by practice, followed by feedback while time consuming can bring about worthwhile change in teaching approach.

The Emerging Resource Role

We have discussed the changing role of the reading specialist in diagnosis and staff development. Throughout the discourse the reading teacher has been identified as reading specialist. It is now time to identify the reading specialist as the reading resource teacher. The resource teacher is differentiated from the reading specialist because the primary role has shifted from teaching students to aiding teachers. As a resource person consulting and coordinating services are provided for classroom teachers. This is not an administrative position with line authority rather this is a staff position advisory to teachers. Resource person, coordinator or consultant can be used interchangeably to refer to this position.

In The School Reading Program, Smith, Otto, and Hansen document the differing roles of special teacher of reading, reading consultant, reading coordinator, reading supervisor and reading resource person. The reader is urged to consult this excellent resource for details. (Smith, Otto and Hansen, Chapter 9) For our purpose here we have used reading specialist and now finally reading resource person. As stated, the reading resource person provides advisory services to classroom teachers. College preparation for this position entails advanced courses in the teaching of reading representing at least one year beyond the master's degree. It is now time to consider the new role of the resource teacher in communication and leadership.

Communication

Effective communication must serve one or more purposes. It may convey ideas, transmit feelings, or pass on or change attitudes. The main test of the effectiveness in communication is the results. (Harrison, p. 97) The reading resource person as consultant to classroom teachers must be a good listener, be well organized, separate fact from opinion, be aware of timing and be sensitive to the feelings of others. Here are some considerations for facilitating communication.

1. Establish procedures for sending information to teachers and receiving information from teachers. Be mindful of the importance of both formal and informal communication. Chats in the teacher's lounge can open channels of communication informally. Individual conferences with teachers, grade level meetings, and specific suggestions to improve the teaching of reading are more formal and require planning to be effective.

2. Consider all communication as privileged information. Do not share information received in interactions with individual teachers unless permission has been granted for sharing. The role of the resource person depends upon a flow of information. As a helpful person who can be trusted, this communication will continue.

3. Consider yourself a teacher first and a resource person second. Establish yourself as a member of a team with shared responsibilities for the teaching of reading.

4. Listen carefully to the concerns of teachers. Often an awareness of a problem on the part of the resource person can lead to resolution at a later time.

5. Utilize non-verbal communication effectively. Eye contact with a speaker is essential. Gestures, nods, etc., signify understanding.

6. Develop a liking for people and respect for ideas of others.

7. Think before speaking - this will aid but not insure speaking wisely and well. Remember the speaker has a limited time to present ideas as well as establish and modify attitudes. Clarity and conciseness are critical.

8. Keep informed by membership and participation in local, state, and international reading organizations. Utilize publications of these organizations as sources of information to be shared with classroom teachers.

Leadership

The last role change from reaching specialist to that of reading resource person is that of leadership. While leadership has always been part of teaching, it takes a particular style when leading adults rather than children. Leadership is a process oriented toward improving teaching and facilitating interpersonal relationships. The resource person must stop thinking exclusively as a classroom teacher, develop leadership competence, balance theory and practice, as well as plan for overall school-wide change in reading procedure. (Doll, p. 7) The following suggestions are helpful in providing leadership.

1. Use the strengths of teachers when forming groups for curriculum study and communicating with parents, press, and public.

2. Continue to work with children even though this is now a lesser part of the job role. Demonstrate new techniques for instruction whenever requested. Visit classrooms whenever possible.

3. Maintain continuous communication with teachers.

4. Protect accessibility to teachers. Follow-up as soon as possible with requests for assistance.

5. Establish study groups to modify goals and direction for the reading program in keeping with current needs.

6. Support the teachers in communication with administration.

The role of the reading resource teacher is far more complex than the role of the reading specialist. New dimensions are added to diagnosis, staff development, communication, and leadership. Most reading specialists today are certified by the various state education agencies for course work in foundations of reading; diagnosis and correction; developmental and content reading instruction and clinical practice. Little if any direct instruction is provided at the university level for leadership and human relations preparation. College preparation at the sixth year should include a course or courses in leadership, a course or courses in communication, human relations, and public relations, as well as an intern experience in some school coordinating the reading program.

Conclusion

This paper has described the metamorphosis of the role of reading specialist to that of reading resource teacher. Specific changes were documented in responsibilities for diagnosis, staff development, communication, and leadership. Whenever possible, the writer consulted the literature to document changes taking place. When this documentation was not available, the writer drew from personal experience with reading specialists, reading consultants, and reading supervisors, in the state of Ohio and elsewhere. Most of the personal contact was with former students of Bowling Green State University's reading program and especially students from the Leadership in Reading course taught by this writer.

20/7

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20/7